



Organ grinder's street music plays part in New Music ensemble



Henk de Graauw builds mechanical organs which will be used in concert Feb. 12 at the Music Gallery.
ANDREW FRANCIS WALLACE/TORONTO STAR

By Trish Crawford
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When Henk de Graauw was growing up in Holland in the '40s, he was entertained by the barrel organs playing on the streets and in local fairs. Sometimes they were so big and ornate they were carried on the back of a truck or were flashing and blinking in the centre of carousels. Much more common were the chest organs, carried on the body, which were operated by a crank.

In North America, the organ grinder would bring a monkey along to entertain, as he strolled the streets.

The rich, colourful, history of these instruments, which have been around since the 1800s, continued to fascinate de Graauw who immigrated to Canada in 1953. He has spent the last 30 years

researching and eventually making barrel organs out of cherry wood. He also translated a book on how to build them from Dutch to English for fellow enthusiasts.

"I'm pretty handy," he says, taking visitors on a tour of his workshop. "I've always been good with gadgets."

Working in the shed at the back of his garden in his Brampton home, the retired Nortel manager is constructing a number of organs including a Wurlitzer. This Sunday, his barrel organ named Melodia will be played at the 8 p.m. Continuum Contemporary Music Concert at the Music Gallery.

Titled *ORGANized, Mechanical organs and other musical contraptions*, it is a concert that "breaches boundaries' between machines and people and the past and present, organizers say.

Jennifer Waring, ensemble co-artistic director, says many modern composers are interested in "using mechanical devices to create music." They are doing this with the assistance of computer programs which link the composition to the music played.

For instance, de Graauw's barrel organ uses an automatic blower system to fill the wooden pipes with air and a computer board to play the notes. In this way its performance will begin with the push of a button.

The New Music ensemble is comprised of Anne Thompson (flute), Max Christie (clarinet), Carol Fujino (violin), Paul Widner (cello), Laurent Philippe (piano) and Ryan Scott (percussion). Guest artists are Haruka Fujii (percussion) and Brian Current (conductor).

There will be two other organs used in the performance and de Graauw's Melodia will be played as part of a performance of composer Richard Marsella's revamped beer barrel polka.

The ensemble which has toured Europe and Canada, is dedicated to finding, commissioning and presenting new music in its many forms, says Waring.

It's important to find works "that are artistically satisfying to composers but comprehensible to the audience," says Waring, who lived in the Netherlands for three years and became acquainted with the street organs there. She personally scouted de Graauw's music collection while planning the show.

She wasn't surprised to find out he was from Holland as "the Dutch are so experimental. It is the mecca of new music that we do."

Although a crank organ is not part of the performance, it will be played at the beginning of the show.

At 4 p.m. "organ whisperer" de Graauw will give a talk and demonstration at the Music Gallery.

JUST THE FACTS

WHAT: ORGANized, by Continuum Contemporary Music

WHERE: The Music Gallery, 197 John St.

WHEN: Feb. 12, 8 p.m.

TICKETS: Tickets, \$25 adults, \$15 students, seniors, arts workers.

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